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JAMES K. MOFFITT

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COMUS, A MASK.

THE FIRST SCENE DISCOVERS A
WILD WOOD.

The attendant Spirit descends or enters.

B

BEFORE the starry
threshold of Jove's
court My mansion
is, where those im-
mortal shapes Of
bright aerial spir-
its live insphered
In regions mild of
calm & serene air,
Above the smoke

and stir of this dim spot, Which men call
Earth, and with low-thoughtèd care Con-
fined, & pester'd in this pinfold here, Strive
to keep up a frail and feverish being, Un-
mindful of the crown that virtue gives, Af-
ter this mortal change, to her true servants,
Amongst the enthroned Gods on sainted
seats. Yet some there be that by due steps
aspire To lay their just hands on that gold-
en key, That opes the palace of eternity;
To such my errand is; and but for such, I

b

1

would not soil these pure ambrosial weeds
With the rank vapours of this sin-worn
mould.

BUT to my task. Neptune, besides
the sway Of every salt flood, and
each ebbing stream, Took in by
lot 'twixt high and nether Jove, Imperial
rule of all the sea-girt isles, That like to
rich and various gems inlay The unadorn-
èd bosom of the deep; Which he, to grace
his tributary Gods, By course commits to
sev'ral government, And gives them leave
to wear their sapphire crowns, And wield
their little tridents: but this Isle, The great-
est and the best of all the main, He quar-
ters to his blue-hair'd deities; And all this
tract that fronts the falling sun A noble
Peer of mickle trust and power Has in his
charge, with temper'd awe to guide An
old and haughty nation, proud in arms:
Where his fair offspring, nursed in prince-
ly lore, Are coming to attend their father's
state, And new-intrusted sceptre; but their
way Lies through the perplex'd paths of
this drear wood, The nodding horror of
whose shady brows Threats the forlorn and
wand'ring passenger; And here their ten-

der age might suffer peril, But that by quick command from sov'reign Jove, I was dispatch'd for their defence & guard; And listen why, for I will tell you now What never yet was heard in tale or song, From old or modern bard, in hall or bower.

BACCHUS, that first from out the purple grape Crush'd the sweet poison of misusèd wine, After the Tuscan mariners transform'd, Coasting the Tyrrhene shore, as the winds listed, On Circe's island fell: who knows not Circe, The daughter of the sun, whose charmèd cup Whoever tasted, lost his upright shape, And downward fell into a grovellingswine? This Nymph that gazed upon his clust'ring locks, With ivy berries wreath'd, and his blithe youth, Had by him, ere he parted thence, a son Much like his father, but his mother more, Whom therefore she brought up, and Comus named: Who ripe, and frolic of his full grown age, Roving the Celtic & Iberian fields, At last betakes him to this ominous wood, And in thick shelter of black shades imbower'd, Excels his mother at her mighty art, Offering to ev'ry weary traveller, His orient liquor in a

crystal glass, To quench the drouth of Phœbus; which as they taste, (For most do taste through fond intemperate thirst) Soon as the potion works, their human count'nance, Th' express resemblance of the Gods, is changed Into some brutish form of wolf, or bear, Or ounce, or tiger, hog, or bearded goat, All other parts remaining as they were; And they, so perfect is their misery, Not once perceive their foul disfigurement, But boast themselves more comely than before, And all their friends & native home forget, To roll with pleasure in a sensual sty. Therefore, when any favour'd of high Jove Chances to pass through this adventurous glade, Swift as the sparkle of a glancing star I shoot from heav'n, to give him safe convoy, As now I do: But first I must put off These my sky robes spun out of Iris' woof, And take the weeds and likeness of a swain, That to the service of this house belongs, Who with his soft pipe, and smooth-dittied song, Well knows to still the wild winds when they roar, And hush the waving woods, nor of less faith, And in this office of his mountain watch, Likeliest, & nearest to the present aid Of this occasion.

But I hear the tread Of hateful steps; I must
be viewless now.

COMUS enters with a charming-rod
in one hand, his glass in the other;
with him a rout of monsters, headed like
sundry sorts of wild beasts, but otherwise
like men and women, their apparel glisten-
ing; they come in making a riotous & un-
ruly noise, with torches in their hands.

COMUS.

THE star that bids the shepherd fold,
Now the top of heaven doth hold;
And the gilded car of day
His glowing axle doth allay
In the steep Atlantic stream;
And the slope sun his upward beam
Shoots against the dusky pole,
Pacing toward the other goal
Of his chamber in the east.
Meanwhile, welcome Joy and Feast,
Midnight Shout and Revelry,
Topsy Dance and Jollity.
Braid your locks with rosy twine,
Dropping odours, dropping wine.
Rigour now is gone to bed,
And Advice with scrupulous head,

Strict Age, and sour Severity,
 With their grave saws in slumber lie.
 We that are of purer fire
 Imitate the starry quire,
 Who in their nightly watchful spheres
 Lead in swift round the months and years.
 The sounds & seas, with all their finny drove
 Now to the moon in wavering morrice move,
 And on the tawny sands and shelves
 Trip the pert fairies and the dapper elves.
 By dimpled brook, and fountain brim,
 The wood-nymphs, deck'd with daisies trim,
 Their merry wakes and pastimes keep;
 What hath night to do with sleep?
 Night hath better sweets to prove,
 Venus now wakes, and wakens Love.
 Come, let us our rites begin,
 'Tis only day-light that makes sin,
 Which these dun shades will ne'er report.
 Hail, Goddess of nocturnal sport,
 Dark-veil'd Cotytto, t'whom the secret flame
 Of midnight torches burns; mysterious dame,
 That ne'er art call'd, but when the dragon
 womb
 Of Stygian darkness spits her thickest gloom,
 And makes one blot of all the air;
 Stay thy cloudy ebon chair,

Wherein thou rid'st with Hecate, & befriend
Us thy vow'd priests, till utmost end
Of all thy dues be done, and none left out,
Ere the babbling eastern scout,
The nice morn, on the Indian steep
From her cabin'd loophole peep,
And to the tell-tale sun descry
Our conceal'd solemnity.
Come, knit hands, and beat the ground
In a light fantastic round.

The Measure.

BREAK off, break off, I feel the
different pace Of some chaste
footing near about this ground.
Run to your shrouds, within these brakes
and trees; Our number may affright! Some
virgin sure (For so I can distinguish by
mine art) Benighted in these woods. Now
to my charms, And to my wily trains; I
shall ere long Be well-stock'd with as fair
a herd as grazed About my mother Circe.
Thus I hurl My dazzling spells into the
spongy air, Of power to cheat the eye with
blar illusion, And give it false present-
ments, lest the place And my quaint habits
breed astonishment And put the damsel to

suspicious flight, Which must not be, for that's against my course: I, under fair pretence of friendly ends, And well-placed words of glozing courtesy Baited with reasons not unplausible, Wind me into the easy-hearted man, And hug him into snares. When once her eye Hath met the virtue of this magic dust, I shall appear some harmless villager, Whom thrift keeps up about his country gear. But here she comes, I fairly step aside, And hearken, if I may, her business here.

The Lady enters

LADY.

THIS way the noise was, if mine ear be true, My best guide now; methought it was the sound Of riot and ill-managed merriment, Such as the jocund flute, or gamesome pipe Stirs up among the loose unletter'd hinds, When for their teeming flocks, and granges full, In wanton dance, they praise the bounteous Pan, And thank the Gods amiss. I should be loath To meet the rudeness, and swill'd insolence Of such late wassailers; yet O

where else Shall I inform my unacquaint-
ed feet In the blind mazes of this tangled
wood? My Brothers, when they saw me
wearied out With this long way, resolving
here to lodge Under the spreading favour
of these pines, Stepp'd, as they said, to the
next thicket side To bring me berries, or
such cooling fruit As the kind hospitable
woods provide. They left me then, when
the gray-hooded Even, Like a sad votarist
in palmer's weed, Rose from the hindmost
wheels of Phœbus' wain. But where they
are, and why they came not back, Is now
the labour of my thoughts; 'tis likeliest
They had engaged their wandering steps
too far; And envious darkness, ere they
could return, Had stole from me: else, O
thievish Night, Why shouldst thou, but
for some felonious end, In thy dark lantern
thus close up the stars That nature hung
in heaven, and fill'd their lamps With ever-
lasting oil, to give due light To the misled
and lonely traveller? This is the place, as
well as I may guess, Whence even now the
tumult of loud mirth Was rife, and perfect
in my listening ear, Yet nought but single
darkness do I find. What might this be? A

thousand fantasies Begin to throng into my
memory, Of calling shapes, and beckoning
shadows dire, And aëry tongues, that syll-
able men's names On sands, and shores, and
desert wildernesses. These thoughts may
startle well, but not astound The virtu-
ous mind, that ever walks attended By a
strong-siding champion, Conscience.—O
welcome pure-eyed Faith, white-handed
Hope, Thou hov'ring Angel, girt with
golden wings, And thou, unblemish'd form
of Chastity! I see ye visibly, and now be-
lieve That He, the Supreme Good, t'whom
all things ill Are but as slavish officers of
vengeance, Would send a glist'ring guard-
ian, if need were, To keep my life and hon-
our unassail'd. Was I deceived, or did a sa-
ble cloud Turn forth her silver lining on
the night? I did not err, there does a sable
cloud Turn forth her silver lining on the
night, And casts a gleam over this tufted
grove: I cannot halloo to my Brothers, but
Such noise as I can make to be heard far-
thest I'll venture, for my new enliven'd
spirits Prompt me; and they perhaps are
not far off.

SONG.

SWEET Echo, sweetest nymph, that
liv'st unseen,
Within thy aëry shell,
By slow Meander's margent green,
And in the violet-embroider'd vale,
Where the love-lorn nightingale
Nightly to thee her sad song mourneth well;
Canst thou not tell me of a gentle pair
That liketh thy Narcissus are?
O, if thou have
Hid them in some flowery cave,
Tell me but where,
Sweet queen of parly, daughter of the sphere!
So mayst thou be translated to the skies,
And give resounding grace to all heav'n's
harmonies.

Enter Comus.

COMUS.

CAN any mortal mixture of earth's
mould Breathe such divine en-
chanting ravishment? Sure some-
thing holy lodges in that breast, And with
these raptures moves the vocal air To tes-
tify his hidden residence: How sweetly did

they float upon the wings Of silence,
through the empty-vaulted night, Ate every
fall smoothing the raven-down Of dark-
ness till it smiled! I have oft heard My mo-
ther Circe with the Sirens three, Amidst
the flowery-kirtled Naiades, Culling their
potent herbs, and baleful drugs, Who, as
they sung, would take the prison'd soul
And lap it in Elysium; Scylla wept, And
chid her barking waves into attention, And
fell Charybdis murmur'd soft applause: Yet
they in pleasing slumber lull'd the sense,
And in sweet madness robb'd it of itself;
But such a sacred, and home-felt delight,
Such sober certainty of waking bliss I never
heard till now. I'll speak to her, And she
shall be my queen. Hail, foreign wonder!
Whom certain these rough shades did never
breed, Unless the goddess that in rural
shrine Dwell'st here with Pan, or Silvan,
by blest song Forbidding every bleak un-
kindly fog To touch the prosperous growth
of this tall wood.

LADY. Nay, gentle Shepherd, ill is
lost that praise That is address'd to
unattending ears; Not any boast of skill,
but extreme shift How to regain my sev-

er'd comany, Compell'd me to awake the
courteous Echo To give me answer from
her mossy couch.

COMUS. What chance, good Lady,
hath bereft you thus?

LADY. Dim darkness, and this leafy
labyrinth.

COMUS. Could that divide you from
near-ushering guides?

LADY. They left me weary on a gras-
sy turf.

COMUS. By falsehood, or discour-
esy, or why?

LADY. To seek i' the valley some
cool friendly spring.

COMUS. And left your fair side all
unguarded, Lady?

LADY. They were but twain, and
purposed quick return.

COMUS. Perhaps forestalling night
prevented them.

LADY. How easy my misfortune is
to hit!

COMUS. Imports their loss, beside
the present need?

LADY. No less than if I should my
Brothers lose.

COMUS. Werethey of manly prime,
or youthful bloom?

LADY. As smooth as Hebe's their
unrazor'd lips.

COMUS. Two such I saw, what time
the labour'd ox In his loose traces
from the furrow came, And the swink'd
hedger at his supper sat; I saw them under
a green mantling vine That crawls along
the side of yon small hill, Plucking ripe
clusters from the tender shoots; Their port
was more than human, as they stood: I took
it for a faery vision Of some gay creatures
of the element, That in the colours of the
rainbow live, And play i' the plighted
clouds. I was awe-struck, And as I pass'd,
I worshipp'd; if those you seek, It were a
journey like the path to heav'n, To help
you find them.

LADY. Gentle Villager, What rea-
diest way would bring me to that
place?

COMUS. Due west it rises from this
shrubby point.

LADY. To find that out, good Shep-
herd, I suppose, In such a scant al-
lowance of star-light, Would overtask the

best land-pilot's art, Without the sure guess
of well-practised feet.

COMUS. I know each lane, and every
alley green, Dingle or bushy dell of
this wild wood, And every bosky bourn
from side to side, My daily walks and an-
cient neighbourhood; And if your stray-
attendants be yet lodged Or shroud with-
in these limits, I shall know Ere morrow
wake, or the low-roosted lark From her
thatch'd pallet rouse; if otherwise, I can
conduct you, Lady, to a low But loyal cot-
tage, where you may be safe Till further
quest.

LADY. Shepherd, I take thy word,
And trust thy honest offer'd court-
esy, Which oft is sooner found in lowly
sheds With smoky rafters, than in tapestry
halls And courts of princes, where it first
was named, And yet is most pretended: in
a place Less warranted than this, or less se-
cure, I cannot be, that I should fear to
change it. Eye me, blest Providence, and
square my trial To my proportion'd strength.
Shepherd, lead on.

Exeunt

Enter the two Brothers.

FIRST BROTHER.

UNMUFFLE, ye faint stars, and
thou, fair moon, That wont'st to
love the traveller's benison, Stoop
thy pale visage through an amber cloud,
And disinherit Chaos, that reigns here In
double night of darkness and of shades; Or
if your influence be quite damm'd up With
black usurping mists, some gentle taper,
Though a rush candle from the wicker-
hole Of some clay habitation, visit us With
thy long-levell'd rule of streaming light;
And thou shalt be our star of Arcady, Or
Tyrian Cynosure.

SECOND BROTHER.

OR if our eyes Be barr'd that hap-
piness, might we but hear The
folded flocks penn'd in their wat-
tled cotes, Or sound of pastoral reed with
oaten stops, Or whistle from the lodge, or
village cock Count the night watches to
his feathery dames, 'Twould be some sol-
ace yet, some little cheering In this close
dungeon of innumerable boughs. But O

that hapless virgin, our lost Sister! Where may she wander now, whither betake her From the chill dew, among rude burs and thistles? Perhaps some cold bank is her bolster now, Or 'gainst the rugged bark of some broadelm Leans her unpillow'd head, fraught with sad fears. What, if in wild amazement, & affright, Or, while we speak, within the direful grasp Of savage hunger, or of savage heat?

FIRST BROTHER.

PEACE, Brother, be not over-exquisite To cast the fashion of uncertain evils; For grant they be so, while they rest unknown, What need a man forestall his date of grief, And run to meet what he would most avoid? Or if they be but false alarms of fear, How bitter is such self-delusion! I do not think my Sister so to seek, Or so unprincipled in virtue's book, And the sweet peace that goodness bosoms ever, As that the single want of light and noise (Not being in danger, as I trust she is not) Could stir the constant mood of her calm thoughts, And put them into misbecoming plight. Virtue could see

to do what virtue would By her own radiant light, though sun and moon Were in the flat sea sunk. And Wisdom's self Oft seeks to sweet retirèd solitude, Where with her best nurse Contemplation She plumes her feathers, and lets grow her wings, That in the various bustle of resort Were all-to ruffled, and sometimes impair'd. He that has light within his own clear breast, May sit 'i the centre, and enjoy bright day: But he that hides a dark soul, and foul thoughts, Benighted walks under the mid-day sun; Himself is his own dungeon.

SECOND BROTHER.

TIS most true, That musing meditation most affects The pensive secrecy of desert cell, Far from the cheerful haunt of men and herds, And sits as safe as in a senate house; For who would rob a hermit of his weeds, His few books, or his beads, or maple dish, Or do his gray hairs any violence? But beauty, like the fair Hesperian tree Laden with blooming gold, had need the guard Of dragon-watch with unenchanted eye, To save her blossoms, & defend her fruit From the

rash hand of bold incontinence. You may
as well spread out the unsunn'd heaps Of
miser's treasure by an outlaw's den, And tell
me it is safe, as bid me hope Danger will
wink on opportunity, And let a single help-
less maiden pass Uninjured in this wild sur-
rounding waste. Of night, or loneliness, it
recks me not; I fear the dread events that
dog them both, Lest some ill-greeting
touch attempt the person Of our unown-
èd Sister.

FIRST BROTHER.

I DO not, Brother, Infer, as if I
thought my Sister's state Secure
without all doubt, or controver-
sy; Yet where an equal poise of hope and
fear Does arbitrate the event, my nature is
That I incline to hope, rather than fear,
And gladly banish squint suspicion. My
Sister is not so defenceless left, As you im-
agine; she has a hidden strength Which
you remember not.

SECOND BROTHER.

WHAT hidden strength, Unless the
strength of Heav'n, if you mean
that?

FIRST BROTHER.

I MEAN that too, but yet a hidden strength, Which, if Heav'n gave it, may be term'd her own; 'Tis chastity, my Brother, chastity: She that hast that, is clad in complete steel, And like a quiver'd Nymph with arrows keen May trace huge forests, and unharbour'd heaths, Infamous hills, and sandy perilous wilds, Where through the sacred rays of chastity, No savage fierce, bandit, or mountaineer Will dare to soil her virgin purity: Yea there, where very desolation dwells, By grots, and caverns shagg'd with horrid shades, She may pass on with unblench'd majesty, Be it not done in pride, or in presumption. Some say no evil thing that walks by night, In fog, or fire, by lake, or moorish fen, Blue meagre hag, or stubborn unlaid ghost, That breaks his magic chains at curfew time, No goblin, or swart faery of the mine, Hath hurtful power o'er true virginity. Do ye believe me yet, or shall I call Antiquity from the old schools of Greece To testify the arms of chastity? Hence had the huntress Dian her dread bow, Fair silver-shafted queen, for ever

chaste, Wherewith she tamed the brinded
lioness And spotted mountain pard, but set
at nought The frivolous bolt of Cupid;
Gods and men Fear'd her stern frown, and
she was queen o' th' woods. What was
that snaky-headed Gorgon shield, That
wise Minerva wore, unconquer'd virgin,
Wherewith she freezed her foes to con-
geal'd stone, But rigid looks of chaste aus-
terity, And noble grace that dash'd brute
violence With sudden adoration and blank
awe? So dear to heav'n is saintly chastity,
That when a soul is found sincerely so, A
thousand liveried angels lacky her, Driv-
ing far off each thing of sin and guilt, And
in clear dream, and solemn vision, Tell her
of things that no gross ear can hear Till oft
converse with heav'nly habitants Begin to
cast a beam on th' outward shape, The un-
polluted temple of the mind, And turns it
by degrees to the soul's essence, Till all be
made immortal: but when lust, By un-
chaste looks, loose gestures, and foul talk,
But most by lewd and lavish act of sin, Lets
in defilement to the inward parts, The soul
grows clotted by contagion, Imbodies, and
imbrutes, till she quite lose The divine pro-

perty of her first being. Such are those thick
& gloomy shadows damp Oft seen in char-
nal vaults, and sepulchres, Ling'ring and
sitting by a new-made grave, As loath to
leave the body that it loved, And link'd it-
self by carnal sensuality To a degenerate
and degraded state.

SECOND BROTHER.

HOW charming is divine philos-
ophy! Not harsh, and crabbed, as
dull fools suppose, But musical,
as in Apollo's lute, And a perpetual feast of
nectar'd sweets, Where no crude surfeit
reigns.

FIRST BROTHER.

LIST, list, I hear Some far off halloo
break the silent air.

SECOND BROTHER.

WETHOUGHT so too: what should
it be?

FIRST BROTHER.

FOR certain Either some one like us
night-founder'd here, Or else some
neighbour woodman, or, at worst, Some
roving robber calling to his fellows.

SECOND BROTHER.

HEAV'N keep my Sister. Again, again, and near; Best draw, and stand upon our guard.

FIRST BROTHER.

I'LL halloo; If he be friendly, he comes well; if not, Defence is a good cause, and Heav'n be for us.

Enter the attentive Spirit habited like a shepherd.

That halloo I should know, what are you? speak; Come not too near, you fall on iron stakes else.

SPIRIT.

WHAT voice is that? my young Lord? speak again.

SECOND BROTHER.

OBROTHER, 'tis my father's shepherd, sure.

FIRST BROTHER.

THYRSIS? Whose artful strains have oft delay'd The huddling brook to hear his madrigal, And sweeten'd every

muskrose of the dale. How cam'st thou here, good swain? hath any ram Slipt from the fold, or young kid lost his dam, Or straggl'ing wether the pent flock forsook? How could's't thou find this dark sequester'd nook?

SPIRIT.

O MY loved master's heir, and his next joy, I came not here on such a trivial toy As a stray'd ewe, or to pursue the stealth Of pilfering wolf; not all the fleecy wealth That doth enrich these downs is worth a thought To this my errand, and the care it brought. But, O my virgin Lady, where is she? How chance she is not in your company?

FIRST BROTHER.

TO tell thee sadly, Shepherd, without blame, Or our neglect, we lost her as we came.

SPIRIT.

AYE me unhappy! then my fears are true.

FIRST BROTHER.

WHAT fears, good Thyrsis? Prithee briefly show.

SPIRIT.

I'LL tell ye; 'tis not vain or fabulous,
Though so esteem'd by shallow ignorance,
What the sage poets, taught by the heav'nly Muse,
Storied of old, in high immortal verse,
Of dire chimeras, and enchanted isles,
And rifted rocks whose entrance leads to Hell;
For such there be, but unbelief is blind.

WITHIN the navel of this hideous
wood, Immured in cypress shades
a sorcerer dwells, Of Bacchus and of Circe
born, great Comus. Deep skill'd in all his
mother's witcheries, And here to every
thirsty wanderer By sly enticement gives
his baneful cup, With many murmurs
mix'd, whose pleasing poison The visage
quite transforms of him that drinks, And
the inglorious likeness of a beast Fixes in-
stead, unmoulding reason's mintage Char-
acter'd in the face: this I have learnt Tend-
ing my flocks hard by i' th' hilly crofts,
That brow this bottom-glade, whence,
night by night, He and his monstrous rout
are heard to howl, Like stabled wolves, or
tigers at their prey, Doing abhorred rites
to Hecate In their obscurèd haunts of in-

most bowers. Yet have they many baits, & guileful spells, To inveigle & invite th' unwary sense Of them that pass unweeting by the way. This ev'ning late, by then the chewing flocks Had ta'en their supper on the savoury herb Of knot-grass dew-besprent, and were in fold, I sat me down to watch upon a bank With ivy canopied, & interwove With flaunting honey-suckle, and began, Wrapt in a pleasing fit of melancholy, To meditate my rural minstrelsy, Till fancy had her fill, but ere a close, The wonted roar was up amidst the woods, And fill'd the air with barbarous dissonance; At which I ceased, and listen'd them a while, Till an unusual stop of sudden silence Gave respite to the drowsy frightened steeds, That draw the litter of close-curtain'd sleep; At last a soft & solemn-breathing sound Rose like a steam of rich distill'd perfumes, And stole upon the air, that even Silence Was took ere she was ware, & wish'd she might Deny her nature, and be never more, Still to be so displaced. I was all ear, And took in strains that might create a soul Under the ribs of death: but O ere long Too well

I did perceive it was the voice Of my most honour'd Lady, your dear Sister. Amazed I stood, harrow'd with grief & fear, And O poor hapless nightingale thought I, How sweet thou sing'st, how near the deadly snare! Then down the lawns I ran with headlong haste, Through paths and turnings often trod by day, Till guided by mine ear I found the place, Where that damn'd wizard, hid in sly disguise, (For so by certain signs I knew) had met Already, ere my best speed could prevent, The aidless innocent Lady his wish'd prey, Who gently ask'd if he had seen such two, Supposing him some neighbour villager. Longer I durst not stay, but soon I guess'd Ye were the two she meant; with that I sprung Into swift flight, till I had found you here, But further know I not.

SECOND BROTHER.

O NIGHT and shades, How are ye join'd with Hell in triple knot, Against the unarm'd weakness of one virgin, Alone and helpless! Is this the confidence You gave me, Brother?

FIRST BROTHER.

YES, and keep it still, Lean on it safely; not a period Shall be unsaid for me: against the threats Of malice or of sorcery, or that power Which erring men call Chance, this I hold firm, Virtue may be assail'd, but never hurt, Surprised by unjust force, but not enthrall'd; Yea even that which mischief meant most harm, Shall in the happy trial prove most glory: But evil on itself shall back recoil, And mix no more with goodness, when at last Gather'd like scum, & settled to itself, It shall be in eternal restless change Self-fed, and self-consumèd: if this fail, The pillar'd firmament is rottenness, And earth's base built on stubble. But come, let's on. Against the opposing will and arm of heaven May never this just sword be lifted up; But for that damn'd magician, let him be girt With all the grisly legions that troop Under the sooty flag of Acheron, Harpies and Hydras, or all the monstrous forms 'Twixt Africa and Ind, I'll find him out, And force him to return his purchase back, Or drag him by the curls to a foul death, Cursed as his life.

SPIRIT.

ALAS! good vent'rous youth, I love
thy courage yet, & bold emprise; But
here thy sword can do thee little stead, Far
other arms & other weapons must Be those
that quell the might of hellish charms: He
with his bare wand can unthread thy joints,
And crumble all thy sinews.

FIRST BROTHER.

WHY prithee, Shepherd, How durst
thou then thyself approach so near,
As to make this relation?

SPIRIT.

CARE & utmost shifts How to secure
the Lady from surprisal, Brought to
my mind a certain shepherd lad, Of small
regard to see to, yet well skill'd In every
virtuous plant & healing herb, That spreads
her verdant leaf to th' morning ray: He
loved me well, and oft would beg me sing,
Which when I did, he on the tender grass
Would sit, and hearken e'en to ecstasy, And
in requital ope his leathern scrip, And show
me simples of a thousand names, Telling

their strange and vigorous faculties: Amongst the rest a small unsightly root, But of divine effect, he cull'd me out; The leaf was darkish, and had prickles on it, But in another country, as he said, Bore a bright golden flow'r, but not in this soil: Unknown, and like esteem'd, & the dull swain Treads on it daily with his clouted shoon And yet more med'cinal is it than that moly That Hermes once to wise Ulysses gave; He call'd it hæmony, and gave it me, And bad me keep it as of sovereign use 'Gainst all enchantments, mildew, blast, or damp, Or ghastly furies' apparition. I pursed it up, but little reck'ning made, Till now that this extremity compell'd: But now I find it true; for by this means I knew the foul enchanter though disguised, Enter'd the very lime-twigs of his spells, And yet came off: if you have this about you, (As I will give you when we go) you may Boldly assault the necromancer's hall; Where if he be, with dauntless hardihood, And brandish'd blade rush on him, break his glass, And shed the luscious liquor on the ground. But seize his wand; though he and his cursed crew Fierce sign of battle make, & menace high,

Or like the sons of Vulcan vomit smoke,
Yet will they soon retire, if he but shrink.

FIRST BROTHER.

THYRSIS, lead on apace, I'll follow
thee, And some good Angel bear a
shield before us.

THE scene changes to a stately palace set out with all manner of delicacies, and a man, like a prince with all dignities, comes to appear with his fiddle, and the lady sits in an enchanted chair, to whom he offers his gifts, which she puts by, and goes about to rise.

COMUS.

DAY, Lady, sit; if I but wave this
wand, Your nerves are all chain'd
up in alabaster, And you a statue, or as
Daphne was Root-bound, that fled Apollo.


LADY.

FOOL, do not boast, Thou canst not
touch the freedom of my mind With
all thy charms, although this corporal rind
Thou hast immanacled, while Heav'n sees
good.


COMUS.

WHY are you vext, Lady? why do you frown? Here dwell no frowns, nor anger; from these gates Sorrow flies far: See, here be all the pleasures That fancy can beget on youthful thoughts, When the fresh blood grows lively, and returns Brisk as the April buds in primrose-season. And first behold this cordial julep here, That flames, & dances in his crystal bounds, With spirits of balm, and fragrant syrups mix'd. Not that Nepenthes, which the wife of Thone In Egypt gave to Jove-born Helena, Is of such power to stir up joy as this, To life so friendly, or so cool to thirst. Why should you be so cruel to yourself, And to those dainty limbs which Nature lent For gentle usage, and soft delicacy? But you invert the covenants of her trust, And harshly deal, like an ill borrower, With that which you received on other terms; Scorning the unexempt condition By which all mortal frailty must subsist, Refreshment after toil, ease after pain, That have been tired all day without repast, And timely rest have wanted; but, fair Virgin, This will restore all soon.

LADY.

 'Twill not, false traitor, 'Twill not restore the truth and honesty That thou hast banish'd from thy tongue with lies. Was this the Cottage, and the safe abode Thou toldst me of? What grim aspects are these, These ugly-headed monsters? Mercy guard me! Hence with thy brew'd enchantments, foul deceiver; Hast thou betray'd my credulous innocence With visor'd falsehood and base forgery? And would'st thou seek again to trap me here With liquorish baits fit to ensnare a brute? Were it a draught for Juno when she banquets, I would not taste thy treasonous offer; none But such as are good men can give good things, And that which is not good, is not delicious To a well-govern'd and wise appetite.

COMUS.

 FOOLISHNESS of men! that lend their ears To those budge doctors of the Stoic fur, And fetch their precepts from the Cynic tub, Praising the lean & sallow Abstinence. Wherefore did Nature pour her bounties forth,

With such a full and unwithdrawing hand,
Covering the earth with odours, fruits, and
flocks, Thronging the seas with spawn in-
numerable, But all to please, and sate the
curious taste? And set to work millions of
spinning worms, That in their green shops
weave the smooth-hair'd silk To deck her
sons; and that no corner might Be vacant
of her plenty, in her own loins She hutch'd
the all-worshipp'd ore, and precious gems,
To store her children with: if all the world
Should in a pet of temp'rance feed on pulse,
Drink the clear stream, and nothing wear
but frieze, Th' All-giver would be un-
thank'd, would be unpraised, Not half his
riches known, and yet despised; And we
should serve him as a grudging master, As
a penurious niggard of his wealth; And
live like Nature's bastards, not her sons,
Who would be quite surcharged with her
own weight, And strangled with her waste
fertility; Th' earth cumber'd, & the wing'd
air dark'd with plumes, The herds would
over-multitude their lords, The sea o'er-
fraught would swell, and th' unsought dia-
monds Would so emblaze the forehead of
the deep, And so bestud with stars, that

they below Would grow inured to light,
and come at last To gaze upon the sun with
shameless brows. List, Lady, be not coy,
and be not cozen'd With that same vaunt-
ed name Virginity. Beauty is Nature's coin,
must not be hoarded But must be current,
and the good thereof Consists in mutual &
partaken bliss, Unsavoury in th' enjoyment
of itself; If you let slip time, like a neglect-
ed rose It withers on the stalk with lan-
guish'd head. Beauty is Nature's brag, and
must be shown In courts, at feasts, & high
solemnities, Where most may wonder at
the workmanship; It is for homely features
to keep home, They had their name thence;
coarse complexions, And cheeks of sorry
grain, will serve to ply The sampler, and to
tease the huswife's wool. What need a ver-
meil-tinctured lip for that, Love-darting
eyes, or tresses like the morn? There was
another meaning in these gifts, Think what,
and be advised, you are but young yet.

LADY.

I HAD not thought to have un-
lockt my lips In this unhallow'd
air, but that this juggler Would
think to charm my judgment, as mine eyes,

Obtruding false rules prank'd in reason's
garb. I hate when vice can bolt her argu-
ments, And virtue has no tongue to check
her pride. Impostor, do not charge most in-
nocent Nature, As if she would her chil-
dren should be riotous With her abun-
dance; she, good cateress, Means her pro-
vision only to the good, That live accord-
ing to her sober laws, And holy dictate of
spare temperance: If every just man, that
now pines with want, Had but a moderate
and beseeming share Of that which lewd-
ly-pamper'd luxury Now heaps upon some
few with vast excess, Nature's full bless-
ings would be well dispensed In unsuper-
fluous even proportion, And she no whit
incumber'd with her store; And then the
giver would be better thank'd, His praise
due paid; for swinish gluttony Ne'er looks
to heav'n amidst his gorgeous feast, But
with besotted base ingratitude Crams, and
blasphemes his feeder. Shall I go on? Or
have I said enough? To him that dares Arm
his profane tongue with contemptuous
words Against the sun-clad power of Chas-
tity, Fain would I something say, yet to
what end? Thou hast nor ear, nor soul to

apprehend The sublime notion, and high
mystery, That must be utter'd to unfold the
sage And serious doctrine of Virginity,
And thou art worthy that thou shouldst
not know More happiness than this thy
present lot. Enjoy your dear wit, & gay rhe-
toric, That hath so well been taught her
dazzling fence, Thou art not fit to hear thy-
self convinced; Yet should I try, the uncon-
trollèd worth Of this pure cause would kin-
dle my rapt spirits To such a flame of sa-
cred vehemence, That dumb things would
be moved to sympathize, And the brute
earth would lend her nerves, and shake, Till
all thy magic structures rear'd so high,
Were shatter'd into heaps o'er thy false
head.

COMUS.

SHE fables not, I feel that I do fear
Her words set off by some supe-
rior power; And though not mor-
tal, yet a cold shudd'ring dew Dips me all
o'er, as when the wrath of Jove Speaks
thunder, and the chains of Erebus, To some
of Saturn's crew. I must dissemble, And try
her yet more strongly. Come, no more, This
is mere moral babble, and direct Against

the canon-laws of our foundation; I must not suffer this, yet 'tis but the lees And settlings of a melancholy blood: But this will cure all straight, one sip of this Will bathe the drooping spirits in delight, Beyond the bliss of dreams. Be wise, and taste.—

THE Brothers rush in with swords drawn, wrest his glass out of his hand, and break it against the ground; his rout make sign of resistance, but are all driven in. The attendant Spirit comes in.

SPIRIT.

WHAT, have you let the false enchanter 'scape? O ye mistook, ye should have snatch'd his wand, And bound him fast; without his rod reversed, And backward mutters of dis severing power, We cannot free the Lady that sits here In stony fetters fix'd, and motionless. Yet stay, be not disturb'd: now I be think me, Some other means I have which may be used, Which once of Melibæus old I learnt, The soothest shepherd that e'er piped on plains.

THERE is a gentle nymph not far
from hence, That with moist curb
sways the smooth Severn stream, Sabrina
is her name, a virgin pure; Whilome she
was the daughter of Lochrine, That had the
sceptre from his father Brute. She, guilt-
less damsel, flying the mad pursuit Of her
enragèd stepdame Guendolen, Commend-
ed her fair innocence to the flood, That
stay'd her flight with his cross-flowing
course. The water nymphs that in the bot-
tom play'd, Held up their pearlèd wrists,
& took her in, Bearing her straight to aged
Nereus' hall, Who piteous of her woes,
rear'd her lank head, And gave her to his
daughters to imbathe In nectar'd lavers
strow'd with asphodel, And through the
porch and inlet of each sense Dropp'd in
ambrosial oils, till she revived, And under-
went a quick immortal change, Made God-
dess of the river: still she retains Her maid-
en gentleness, and oft at eve Visits the herds
along the twilight meadows, Helping all
urchin blasts, and ill-luck signs That the
shrewd meddling elf delights to make,
Which she with precious vial'd liquors
heals. For which the shepherds at their

festivals Carol her goodness loud in rustic
lays, And throw sweet garland wreaths in-
to her stream Of pansies, pinks, and gaudy
daffodils. And, as the old swain said, she
can unlock The clasping charm, and thaw
the numbing spell, If she be right invok-
ed in warbled song, For maidenhood she
loves, & will be swift To aid a virgin, such
as was herself, In hard-besetting need; this
will I try, And add the power of some ad-
juring verse.

SONG.

S ABRINA fair,
Listen where thou art sitting
Under the glassy, cool, translu-
cent wave,
In twisted braids of lilies knitting
The loose train of thy amber-dropping hair;
Listen for dear honour's sake,
Goddess of the silver lake,
Listen and save.
Listen and appear to us
In name of great Oceanus,
By the earth-shaking Neptune's mace,
And Tethys' grave majestic pace,
By hoary Nereus' wrinkled look,

And the Carpathian wisard's hook,
By scaly Triton's winding shell,
And old soothsaying Glaucus' spell,
By Leucothea's lovely hands,
And her son that rules the strands,
By Thetis' tinsel-slipper'd feet,
And the songs of Sirens sweet,
By dead Parthenope's dear tomb,
And fair Ligea's golden comb,
Wherewith she sits on diamond rocks,
Sleeking her soft alluring locks,
By all the nymphs that nightly dance
Upon thy streams with wily glance,
Rise, rise, and heave thy rosy head
From thy coral-paven bed,
And bridle in thy headlong wave,
Till thou our summons answer'd have.

Listen and save.

*Sabrina rises, attended by water-nymphs,
and sings.*

BY the rushy-fringed bank,
Where grows the willow and the
osier dank,
My sliding chariot stays,
Thick set with agate, and the azure sheen
Of turkis blue, and emerald green,

That in the channel strays;
Whilst from off the waters fleet,
Thus I set my printless feet
O'er the cowslip's velvet head,
That bends not as I tread;
Gentle Swain, at thy request
I am here.

SPIRIT.

GODDESS dear,
We implore thy pow'rful hand
To undo the charmèd band
Of true virgin here distress,
Through the force, and through the wile
Of unblest enchanter vile.

SABRINA.

SHEPHERD, 'tis my office best
To help insnared chastity:
Brightest Lady, look on me;
Thus I sprinkle on thy breast
Drops that from my fountain pure
I have kept of precious cure,
Thrice upon thy finger's tip,
Thrice upon thy rubied lip;
Next this marble venom'd seat,
Smear'd with gums of glutinous heat,
I touch with chaste palms moist and cold:

Now the spell hath lost his hold;
And I must haste ere morning hour
To wait in Amphitrite's bower.

Sabrina descends, and the Lady rises out of
her seat.

SPIRIT.

VIRGIN, daughter of Locline
Sprung of old Anchises' line,
May thy brimmèd waves for this
Their full tribute never miss
From a thousand petty rills,
That tumble down the snowy hills
Summer drouth, or singèd air
Never scorch thy tresses fair,
Nor wet October's torrent flood
Thy molten crystal fill with mud;
May thy billows roll ashore
The beryl, and the golden ore;
May thy lofty head be crown'd
With many a tow'r and terrace round,
And here and there thy banks upon
With groves of myrrh and cinnamon.

COME, Lady, while Heav'n lends
us grace,
Let us fly this cursèd place,

Lest the sorcerer us entice
With some other new device.
Not a waste, or needless sound,
Till we come to holier ground;
I shall be your faithful guide
Through this gloomy covert wide.
And not many furlongs thence
Is your Father's residence,
Where this night are met in state
Many a friend to gratulate
His wish'd presence, and beside
All the swains that there abide,
With jigs, and rural dance resort,
We shall catch them at their sport,
And our sudden coming there
Will double all their mirth and cheer;
Come, let us haste, the stars grow high,
But night sits monarch yet in the mid sky.

The Scene changes, presenting Ludlow town and the President's castle; then come in country dancers, after them the attendant Spirit, with the two Brothers, and the Lady.

SONG.

SPIRIT.

BACK, Shepherds, back, enough
your play,
Till next sunshine holiday;
Here be without duck or nod
Other trippings to be trod
Of lighter toes, and such court guise
As Mercury did first devise,
With the mincing Dryades,
On the lawns, and on the leas.

This second Song presents them to their
Father and Mother.

NOBLE Lord, and Lady bright,
I have brought ye new delight,
Here behold so goodly grown
Three fair branches of your own;
Heav'n hath timely tried their youth,
Their faith, their patience, and their truth,
And sent them here through hard assays
With a crown of deathless praise,
To triumph in victorious dance
O'er sensual folly, and intemperance.

The dances ended, the Spirit epiloguises.

SPIRIT.

TO the ocean now I fly,
And those happy climes that lie
Where day never shuts his eye,
Up in the broad fields of the sky:
There I suck the liquid air
All amidst the gardens fair
Of Hesperus, and his daughters three
That sing about the golden tree:
Along the crispèd shades and bowers
Revels the spruce and jocund Spring,
The Graces, and the rosy-bosom'd Hours,
Thither all their bounties bring;
There eternal Summer dwells,
And west-winds, with musky wing,
About the cedarn alleys fling
Nard and cassia's balmy smells.
Iris there with humid bow
Waters the odorous banks, that blow
Flowers of more mingled hue
Than her purpled scarf can show,
And drenches with Elysian dew
(List mortals, if your ears be true)
Beds of hyacinth and roses,
Where young Adonis oft reposes,
Waxing well of his deep wound
In slumber soft, and on the ground

Sadly sits th' Assyrian queen;
But far above in spangled sheen
Celestial Cupid her famed son advanced,
Holds his dear Psyche sweet intranced,
After her wand'ring labours long,
Till free consent the Gods among
Make her his eternal bride,
And from her fair unspotted side
Two blissful twins are to be born,
Youth and Joy; so Jove hath sworn.
But now my task is smoothly done,
I can fly, or I can run
Quickly to the green earth's end,
Where the bow'd welkin slow doth bend,
And from thence can soar as soon
To the corners of the moon.

MORTALS, that would follow me,
Love Virtue, she alone is free,
She can teach ye how to climb
Higher than the sphery chime:
Or, if Virtue feeble were,
Heav'n itself would stoop to her.

PRINTED UNDER THE CARE
OF C. R. ASHBEE, AT THE ESSEX
HOUSE PRESS, WITH A WOOD
BLOCK FRONTISPIECE BY **Reg-**
inald Savage. A.D. MDCCCXI.



Published in England by EDWARD AR-
NOLD, 37 Bedford Street, Strand, and in
America by SAMUEL BUCKLEY & Co., 100
William Street, New York.

150 copies only, and all on vellum. This
copy is No. 29.

